

# Back on the field

## With power supplier's help, Barnesville restores local municipal electric line crew

by Steve Downer

Several smaller municipal utilities have ceased to work on their electric distribution systems in recent decades, due to economic reasons, often turning the work over to contractors or neighboring utilities.

While it is not big news for a municipal utility to get out of running a line crew, it is unusual when one gets back into distribution maintenance. And that is just what Barnesville Municipal Utilities has done, with a little help from its supplemental wholesale power supplier, Missouri River Energy Services (MRES).

Barnesville got out of linework 15 years ago, when it signed a five-year maintenance agreement with a neighboring utility. There was no other alternative at the time, said Guy Swenson, City of Barnesville Telephone, Electric, Cable (TEC) Manager.

Over the years, that original five-year agreement was signed two more times.

The city enjoyed a good working relationship with its service provider, said Swenson, and thought of the lineman (who lived



MRES-employed linemen now headquartered in Barnesville and working for the city are Sam Jones (left) and Alex Klovstad. The city owns the truck, and other materials and equipment.

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MMUA  
3025 Harbor Lane North  
Plymouth, MN 55447  
763.551.1230

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## Willmar transmission project to increase local, regional reliability

Rates are a big consideration, but for most municipal electric utilities the day-to-day concern is reliability. And in this age of the inter-connected electric grid, one giant step toward a more reliable electric system is securing multiple transmission feeds.

Willmar Municipal Utilities (WMU) has had two transmission feeds for many years, but unfortunately—for reliability purposes—both those feeds entered the same substation. According to regulatory docu-

ments, both an Xcel owned transmission line and a higher-voltage Great River Energy (GRE)-owned line interconnected to separate transformers at the same WMU substation.

One localized severe storm and Willmar's outside electrical connection could be severed. To rectify that vulnerability, a dual voltage transformer from the existing sub has been moved to a new location several miles away, allowing WMU to separate the vital transmission

feeds.

The multi-faceted project increases reliability for Willmar electric customers, and those served by other utilities in west central Minnesota.

WMU worked closely through the process with GRE, and also with Xcel. WMU owns the substation. GRE will be the operator, as the facility is in GRE's regional transmission control area.

GRE contracted to build two transmission lines, including

the line connecting the existing substation to the new substation. WMU was responsible for substation construction. A second GRE line continues from the new WMU substation to nearby GRE substations, increasing the overall load serving capability of the transmission system in the area.

The substation project carries an approximately \$4.9 million price tag. Willmar Municipal

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## MMUA and MnOSHA study silica dust hazards with help of members

by Mark Hottel  
Regional Safety Coordinator

MMUA helps members comply with OSHA standards. But did you know the association also works with MnOSHA to provide for scientific sampling and analysis of real-life activities? The goal is to help members comply with certain regulations in the most efficient manner. This type of work also builds trust and leads to a good working relationship with MnOSHA staff.

One such effort is currently underway.

A recently rewritten OSHA standard concerning "respirable crystalline silica" has the potential to affect municipal utilities and public works

departments across the state. The new federal standard for general industry operations became enforceable in Minnesota on July/August 23, 2018. Since most of our operations fall under the definitions used for general industry work, the 1910.1053 standard has our closest attention.

Silica dust has a long history of causing illness and fatalities in occupational settings. Public works and utility employees are performing tasks that can generate very fine "respirable" silica dust. One of our objectives is to determine what levels exist for those tasks. Indeed, the new standard requires that

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MMUA Regional Safety Coordinator Mike Hottel (foreground) inspected a water spray nozzle during routine maintenance activities on a City of Kenyon street sweeping machine—a typical municipal piece of equipment.

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employers make those determinations.

Alternately, if an employer can document the existence of applicable “objective data” for their operations then they don’t need to spend the time and money to collect their own data. MMUA is collaborating with Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Workplace Safety Consultation to establish “objective data” for use by cities and utilities in their efforts to comply with the rules and protect employee health.

Ten MMUA member organizations have participated, beginning last year. Participating members coordinate the timing and the tasks to match up with a visit by an industrial hygienist, (a scientist or technician specializing in occupational health, instrumentation, and methods).

So far, only street sweeping and mowing activities have been sampled. Weather



Left: MMUA's Mark Hottel, along with Peter Kerr, Nate Craig and Wayne Ehrich (from left to right) of the Kenyon city crew. Kenyon is one of 10 cities that is helping MMUA collect scientific data on levels on silica respiratory dust levels raised during typical municipal activities. Below: Peter Kerr re-installs the cabin air filter after an inspection and cleaning.

photos by Steve Downer



conditions during the study period hampered getting some conditions included. However, from what we have seen so far, we predict we will have challenges getting many street sweepers to stay below acceptable levels without some work on our part. This could include routine maintenance, strict operational pro-

cedures, repairs, upgrades, and administrative controls like job rotation.

We are interested in seeing results come in this year on mowing operations. We will withhold predictions due to the small sampling size in 2018.

More sampling is planned for this year which will likely

involve the addition of street repair activities such as crack filling. Please consider whether your city and/or utility would be willing to become a test site for these activities. Let your safety coordinator know if you are.

Lastly, if MNOSHA enforcement comes to your location and discusses the above

activities with your personnel, you can remind them that MMUA members are engaged in long-term research to analyze and mitigate our exposure. (This will not be an adequate defense if you are observed dry-sawing pavement or other known high dust level tasks!)

## Willmar:

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Utilities is also upgrading protection systems at nearby substations.

Getting to this point has been a lengthy endeavor. WMU has been engaged in discussions with transmission-owning utilities in west central Minnesota for many years.

The original Kandiyohi County transmission planning study was completed in 2011 (when former WMU electrical engineer Wes Hompe became general manager). With Hompe at the helm, WMU bought the land for the substation—a former turkey farm—in 2014.

With steady guidance from the WMU Commission, the project stayed on track as Jeron Smith took over as WMU electrical engineer in 2014 and John Harren moved up in the organization to assume the WMU general manager’s duties following Hompe’s 2016 retirement.

WMU coordinated with Xcel to obtain an interconnection agreement. As the project progressed, a federal government shutdown in 2018 delayed GRE in obtaining a permit it needed from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to install its transmission lines out of the substation.

The subgrade work for the transmission lines was put on



WMU's main downtown location includes offices and a steam cogeneration plant.

hold due to bitter cold winter weather. Despite difficulties, the substation control building was completed last year,

as were foundations and the underground work for the new transmission line.

The new substation was placed into service June 26.

WMU now has seven substations, including one adjacent to the downtown steam cogeneration plant.

WMU is also evaluating the feasibility of new generation resources to replace its existing steam plant and complement its diesel generation fleet. The diesels bolster reliability and prevent city-wide blackouts.

WMU has three two-mega-

watt diesel generators located on the east side of Willmar and another three two-megawatt generators on the west side. All the WMU diesel generators are compliant with the latest emissions regulations.

WMU electric and water crews are also busy this summer with a number of projects, including moving power lines and water mains as part of a railroad bypass project, which will also re-route U.S. Hwy. 12, on the west edge of Willmar.

## MMUA Annual Summer Conference

August 19-21 • Breezy Point Resort

Municipal utility people in Minnesota have been meeting every year since 1933 to conduct MMUA’s business. Join us in August for this fun, educational and even occasionally uplifting event.

The MMUA room block with Breezy Point will be held until July 19. The registration fee for the conference increases on July 27.

Associate members are also welcome to attend the conference (as well as the trade show.)

### Sponsorships available

We also have an opportunity for Associate Members to sponsor events at the Summer Conference.

### For more information

Email or call Rita Kelly at rkelly@mmua.org or go to the [www.mmua.org](http://www.mmua.org) Events > Calendar webpage and click on Annual Summer Conference!

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